Spring 2018

Reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada

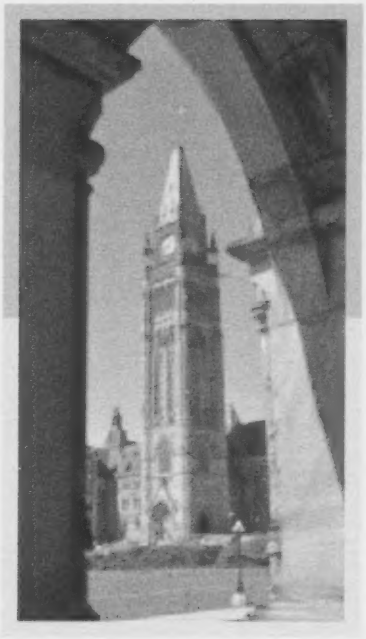
Independent Auditor's Report

REPORT 7

Consular Services to Canadians Abroad—Global Affairs Canada

Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Bureau du vérificateur général du Canada



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Performance audit reports

This report presents the results of a performance audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada under the authority of the *Auditor General Act*.

A performance audit is an independent, objective, and systematic assessment of how well government is managing its activities, responsibilities, and resources. Audit topics are selected based on their significance. While the Office may comment on policy implementation in a performance audit, it does not comment on the merits of a policy.

Performance audits are planned, performed, and reported in accordance with professional auditing standards and Office policies. They are conducted by qualified auditors who

- establish audit objectives and criteria for the assessment of performance,
- gather the evidence necessary to assess performance against the criteria,
- report both positive and negative findings,
- conclude against the established audit objectives, and
- make recommendations for improvement when there are significant differences between criteria and assessed performance.

Performance audits contribute to a public service that is ethical and effective and a government that is accountable to Parliament and Canadians.

The Report is available on our website at www.oag-bvg.gc.ca.

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Introduction

Background

Consular services for Canadians abroad

7.1 Consular services refer to a range of services and assistance available to Canadians living or travelling abroad. The 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations allows Global Affairs Canada staff to help Canadian citizens in difficulty or distress in other countries. Staff can provide up-to-date travel information and advice, process and issue travel documents (such as passports), and coordinate responses in crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters.

7.2 About 470 Global Affairs Canada staff deliver consular and passport services in 150 countries through a network of more than 260 offices (Exhibit 7.1). In the 2016–17 fiscal year, the cost of providing these services was $156 million.

Exhibit 7.1 **Canadian missions around the world provide a wide range of consular services and assistance to Canadians travelling or living abroad**

Type of service	Volume of requests, applications, or cases (in the 2016 calendar year)
General assistance	34,020
Citizenship applications	24,577
Passport services	
Regular passports	188,188
Temporary passports	9,415
Emergency travel documents	3,330
Consular cases	
Arrest and detention	1,610
Death	1,387
Medical assistance	881
Well-being and whereabouts	631
Child- and family-related incidents	666
Other	1,121

Source: Data provided by Global Affairs Canada, 2016

7.3 In 2015, Canadians made almost 55 million trips abroad—an increase of 21% from 10 years ago. This caused growing demand for consular assistance, such as in arrest and detention cases, medical emergencies, or determining the well-being or whereabouts of Canadians abroad. Many consular cases may be considered routine and largely administrative, but others can become complex and time-consuming.

7.4 The level of consular assistance that Canada provides at its missions abroad is discretionary—that is, it is not mandated by legislation. As well, the Canadian government has no jurisdiction over, and little influence on, how foreign countries enforce their laws and carry out judicial processes and government operations. When Canadians travel or live abroad, they are ultimately responsible for informing themselves about the risks and the cultural and legal environments of their destinations.

Focus of the audit

7.5 This audit focused on whether Global Affairs Canada responded adequately to requests for consular assistance from Canadians travelling or living abroad.

7.6 This audit is important because as more Canadians travel or live abroad, the Canadian government is increasingly asked to provide assistance or to intervene on their behalf, particularly in serious cases, such as imprisonment. Significant incidents, such as terrorist activities and natural disasters, have affected travellers and required swift and intensive responses from Canadian missions. When up-to-date travel advice and country information is readily available, travellers are more likely to know about potential security risks and make safe travel decisions.

7.7 More details about the audit objective, scope, approach, and criteria are in **About the Audit** at the end of this report (see pages 23–25).

Findings, Recommendations, and Responses

Providing emergency services to Canadians abroad

Overall message ➔

7.8 Overall, we found that Global Affairs Canada successfully provided consular services during international crises and deployed additional resources to help Canadians abroad. We also found that in crisis situations, Global Affairs Canada promptly updated its online advisories to provide information to travellers. However, it did not always complete mandatory cyclical reviews of its online Travel Advice and Advisories on schedule. Nor did it assess, as part of its communications and outreach, how to best engage the specific types of travellers who are more likely to face difficulties abroad and how to best target its advisories and information.

7.9 These findings matter because when Canadians are in distress abroad, they look to their government for assistance and information, and Canadian missions abroad are at the forefront of both. These findings also matter because if Canadians have access to current, accurate advice about the risks of travelling to various destinations, they may make safer choices, which could reduce demand for consular services.

Context

7.10 It is not uncommon for Canadians travelling or living abroad to face emergencies. Earthquakes, hurricanes, terrorist events, and political uprisings can occur with little notice and leave Canadians in difficult situations while family members at home wonder where they are and if they are safe. Staff at missions abroad play a leading role in these situations. They visit Canadians in hospitals, provide emergency funds to travellers, liaise with family in Canada, provide information to facilitate evacuation, and—in the event of death—help repatriate remains.

7.11 In 2011, Global Affairs Canada spent $15.5 million establishing the 24/7 Emergency Watch and Response Centre to increase its ability to respond to travellers during crises. In 2013, it established a Standing Rapid Deployment Team to deploy staff on short notice to help missions respond to emergencies.

7.12 The Canadian Consular Service Charter sets out Global Affairs Canada's consular responsibilities and objectives during large-scale emergencies. Under the charter, Canada is expected to

- deploy expert teams to expand its capacity in the affected region as needed;
- help Canadians depart to the nearest safe haven on a cost-recovery basis;
- liaise with families in Canada or try to put Canadians in touch with their families; and
- provide timely information through website updates, social media, calls, texts, and email.

Global Affairs Canada responded well to Canadians abroad in emergency or crisis situations

What we found

7.13 We found that Global Affairs Canada increased its capacity as needed to meet demand and deliver consular services to Canadians during crises. However, we also found that, after a crisis, it did not always capture lessons learned or track the implementation of the recommendations they contained.

7.14 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topics:

- Increasing response capacity as needed
- Reports on lessons learned

Why this finding matters

7.15 This finding matters because during crises and at other times while travelling or living abroad, Canadians rely on consular officers for information and support. Lessons learned need to be captured to improve future responses.

Recommendation

7.16 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.23.

Analysis to support this finding

7.17 **What we examined.** We examined how Global Affairs Canada's Emergency Watch and Response Centre and missions abroad responded to requests for assistance during five recent emergencies abroad.

7.18 **Increasing response capacity as needed.** We found that Global Affairs Canada increased its capacity to coordinate its response to emergencies abroad effectively.

7.19 For example, we found that the Department successfully increased its capacity to help Canadians when hurricanes Irma and Maria damaged 16 countries and territories in September 2017. The Emergency Watch and Response Centre added more than 200 staff members and sustained 24-hour operations for at least eight days during each crisis. It received more than 5,000 telephone and email enquiries from the public, and responded to them within an average of two minutes.

7.20 During these events, Global Affairs Canada also deployed expert teams to affected areas within 48 hours when needed. For example, during the 2017 Caribbean hurricane season, it deployed eight employees over the course of the emergencies; they arrived within 72 hours. This team not only supported consular services, but provided logistics, reporting, security, and emergency management assistance to the entire mission.

7.21 Also during the 2017 hurricane season, Global Affairs Canada posted information on its website about the services it was equipped to offer, such as transportation to the nearest safe location on a cost-recovery basis. It also explained the limits of its services. However, many Canadians expected more help and evacuation support that went beyond the services that the Department was equipped to provide. For example, following the devastation of Hurricane Irma in 2017, media articles reported that some Canadians in affected areas expected the government

to charter flights for their return. Global Affairs Canada has recognized the need to better inform Canadians about the nature and extent of the consular services available to them during emergencies.

7.22 **Reports on lessons learned.** Global Affairs Canada policy requires lessons-learned exercises to be completed following its response to significant events abroad. We found completed lessons-learned reports for 12 out of 13 events occurring during our audit period. Lessons-learned reports focused on how the emergency was managed, including communication, but we found they did not consistently assess the ground-level response at the mission. We also found that the Department did not track the implementation of all of the recommendations in its lessons-learned reports. For example, several reports noted that social media were useful ways to contact affected Canadians. Tracking of similar recommendations could lead Global Affairs Canada to formalize the use of social media, which could improve its outreach and response during significant events.

7.23 **Recommendation.** To improve its ability to respond to future crises abroad, Global Affairs Canada should complete lessons-learned reports and action plans after each crisis and track the implementation of the resulting recommendations. As well, it should further develop a communications and outreach strategy, including an analysis of specific types of travellers, to inform Canadians about international travel risks and what consular services are available in times of crisis.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the important role of lessons-learned reports in continually improving emergency response for Canadians and will further standardize the elements of lessons-learned reports across all types of emergencies. Global Affairs Canada will continue to track the implementation of the resulting recommendations. Global Affairs Canada will also further develop its communications and outreach strategy in order to better inform Canadians about travel risks, the importance of preparedness, and the types of consular services that are available in times of crisis. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by October 2018.*

Travel information was updated regularly but needed to better reach those more likely to face difficulties abroad

What we found

7.24 We found that Global Affairs Canada updated its online Travel Advice and Advisories quickly to inform Canadians during crises and in response to events that could affect their safety and security. However, it did not always complete cyclical updates on schedule. We also found it did not examine how to ensure its information and advisories reached those travellers more likely to face difficulties abroad.

7.25 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topics:

- Up-to-date online Travel Advice and Advisories
- Informing at-risk travellers

Why this finding matters

7.26 This finding matters because Canadians rely on Global Affairs Canada's online Travel Advice and Advisories for accurate information to make safe travel choices, both when planning a trip and when already in another country. When more Canadians are aware of the security risks of destinations, they may make safer travel choices, potentially resulting in less demand for emergency consular services.

Recommendation

7.27 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.32.

Analysis to support this finding

7.28 **What we examined.** We examined whether Global Affairs Canada updated its travel information regularly and whether it targeted information to the types of travellers more likely to face difficult situations abroad.

7.29 **Up-to-date online Travel Advice and Advisories.** Global Affairs Canada provides its online Travel Advice and Advisories about countries around the world to help inform Canadian travellers before they leave home and while they are away. Advisories include information about local conditions that can affect travellers' safety, such as security risks, potential health issues, and weather hazards. In response to new events, Global Affairs Canada made many (3,772) updates to its travel advice pages in 2017. We found that the information contained in travel advisories about potentially dangerous areas or situations was similar to that provided to staff at missions abroad.

7.30 According to its own policy, Global Affairs Canada should review and update advisories for 229 destinations every 18 months. However, we found that it completed only one third of these mandatory cyclical reviews on schedule. Timely reviews are important because travellers rely on this information when making decisions on where or when to travel. As well, some travel insurance companies will not provide coverage in areas or regions with a travel advisory.

7.31 **Informing at-risk travellers.** Global Affairs Canada had developed a communications strategy to reach Canadians travelling abroad generally, but did not target information by type of traveller based on knowledge of their specific needs. That is, it had not analyzed previous requests for assistance or how best to engage specific groups more likely to face difficulties abroad and target its information to their needs. While Global Affairs Canada has developed advisories for specific types of travellers in

specific destinations, it is particularly important that the Department understand how best to reach travellers with important information.

7.32 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should review and update its travel advisories in accordance with its 18-month mandatory cyclical review policy. It should improve its communications and outreach strategy to best target at-risk travellers with information based on an analysis of their needs.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of providing up-to-date information to Canadians about safe travel abroad and will continue to enhance efforts to ensure travel information is current. Further steps will be taken to ensure that Travel Advice and Advisories pages are subject to overall cyclical reviews on schedule.*

Global Affairs Canada will continue to provide targeted advice to Canadians and will also enhance its external communications plan in order to extend its reach through additional targeted briefings and outreach. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by September 2018.

Contacting Canadians arrested or detained abroad

Global Affairs Canada did not always contact or assist Canadians detained abroad within its service standards

Overall message ➔

7.33 Overall, we found that Global Affairs Canada officers did not always contact Canadians who had been arrested or detained abroad within its service standards, and case files often provided no explanation as to why no contact was made. We also found that the level of consular assistance varied from one case to another. While assistance may vary due to local conditions or judgment of the consular officer, the files did not contain sufficient documentation to explain this variation. In cases involving allegations of mistreatment or torture of Canadians detained abroad, we found that consular officers took immediate action to contact detainees and make in-person visits when possible. However, we found that it took between one and six months for departmental officials to formally assess the allegations. Also, the Department did not provide sufficient training to consular staff on how to conduct prison visits.

7.34 This finding matters because Canadians detained abroad often require immediate contact and information from family members as well as lists of local lawyers. While consular officers cannot advocate for shorter sentences or release from prison, they can advocate for fair and equal treatment under local laws.

7.35 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topics:

- Initiating contact with detained Canadians
- Monitoring the well-being of imprisoned Canadians
- Responding to mistreatment allegations
- Training for consular officers

Context

7.36 During our audit period, 2,452 Canadians were arrested and detained in foreign prisons or jails, about one third of them in the United States. Consular officers are required by policy (though not by law) to initiate contact with arrested or detained Canadians within 24 hours of being notified. They are also required to make subsequent contact at set frequencies: every 3, 6, or 12 months, depending on the world region. Consular officers must document their efforts to contact detainees in the case file when, due to circumstances such as denial of access by the local government or prison officials, contact may not be made as required.

7.37 In arrest and detention cases, consular services can include

- making contact with the detained person;
- informing family members about the detained person's situation;
- advocating for fair and equal treatment under local laws; and
- advocating for the detainee's general well-being, including basic nutrition or medical care.

7.38 In 2004, Justice Dennis O'Connor conducted an inquiry into the arrest and detention of Maher Arar, and found deficiencies in the consular services provided by Global Affairs Canada. In particular, he recommended that consular staff receive training about how to accurately determine whether someone has been tortured or given harsh treatment in prison. He also recommended that, if there is credible information that a Canadian detained abroad is being or has been tortured, the mission must inform the Minister of Foreign Affairs and involve the Minister in any decisions relating to Canada's response.

Recommendation

7.39 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.52.

Analysis to support this finding

7.40 **What we examined.** We selected a representative sample of 244 case files of 2,452 Canadians arrested and detained abroad. For each file, we examined the date on which Global Affairs Canada was notified and the date on which consular officers made contact. For Canadians detained longer than a week, we examined the ongoing

contacts made by consular officers to see if they met the required frequencies. We removed 54 cases from the sample where the individual had been released prior to or on the same day that Global Affairs Canada was notified. We extrapolated the results of our sample to about 1,600 individuals arrested and detained each year.

7.41 **Initiating contact with detained Canadians.** Among 190 consular cases where Global Affairs Canada had been notified that a Canadian was arrested or detained, we found 70 cases where consular staff contacted the detained person within 24 hours. However, in 110 cases, staff did not contact the detained person within 24 hours, but had documented efforts to do so in about half of these cases. In 10 cases, we found no indication on file that detained persons had been contacted at all before their release.

7.42 In most of the cases where officers did not make initial contact within 24 hours, individuals were contacted within about one month. Consular staff usually contacted detained Canadians by phone, letter, or email, and not in person. However, the Department's policy states that whenever possible, consular officials should initiate contact in person, as it is important to assess the well-being of those detained.

7.43 Based on these results, this means that about half of the 1,600 individuals arrested and detained each year would not be contacted within 24 hours. Most would be contacted within one month of the Department being notified.

7.44 **Monitoring the well-being of imprisoned Canadians.** Global Affairs Canada's policy is to contact imprisoned Canadians at required frequencies. This contact is important to assess the well-being of individuals detained. After their initial contact, consular officers are required to contact individuals again at 3, 6, or 12 months, depending on the country. We found that Global Affairs Canada did not always meet its service standard for ongoing contact with detained individuals. We reviewed 101 cases of Canadians imprisoned abroad for longer than one week and found that Global Affairs Canada maintained contact according to its service standards with 84 detainees. However, in 15 cases, we found that the detainees were not contacted as frequently as required, and that there was no explanation on file. In 2 cases, the consular officers were denied access by foreign governments.

7.45 We found great variation in the level of assistance that consular officers provided from one case to another and across missions, depending on the circumstances of the case and the judgment of the consular officer. For example, while consular officers are required to contact individuals throughout their imprisonment, we found that after first making contact, some officers waited for detainees to contact the mission again themselves before offering assistance. Global Affairs Canada did not have a sufficient quality control process to ensure that consular officers contacted imprisoned Canadians as required.

7.46 We also found that consular officers did not document their assessments of the vulnerability of imprisoned individuals in order to identify which individuals might require more frequent contact and oversight. As a result, we found a high level of inconsistency in the frequency of contact, with no explanation. Global Affairs Canada policy requires more frequent contact with those Canadians imprisoned in countries where conditions are considered harsh and recommends more frequent visits to those who may be especially vulnerable; for example, because of physical or mental health concerns.

7.47 **Responding to mistreatment allegations.** Global Affairs Canada policy requires consular officers to take prompt action in cases involving allegations of mistreatment or torture of detained Canadians. We reviewed 15 cases where the Department assessed the credibility and seriousness of mistreatment or torture allegations. On the basis of our review, we found that consular officers at missions abroad took immediate action to contact detainees and make in-person visits when possible. Consular officers also raised concerns with prison authorities or advocated for improved conditions.

7.48 Global Affairs Canada policy also requires that the Department promptly advise the Minister of Foreign Affairs in writing if there is credible information indicating torture, and the Deputy Minister in cases indicating mistreatment. In all 15 cases, Global Affairs Canada officials found the allegations of torture (5 cases) and mistreatment (10 cases) were serious and credible. However, we found that it took between one and six months for departmental officials to formally assess the allegations. Once officials had determined that torture or mistreatment had likely occurred, it then took a further 47 days on average to inform the Minister in writing for cases of torture, and 29 days on average to inform the Deputy Minister in writing for cases of mistreatment. In our view, taking three months or more to advise the Minister about whether a Canadian detained abroad is being or has been tortured does not meet the intent of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. We note that of the 15 cases we reviewed, 6 Canadians remained detained abroad as of March 2018.

7.49 **Training for consular officers.** Global Affairs Canada has developed a five-day training course for consular officers. The course provides an overview of the operating environment officials may encounter and includes one-hour sessions on how to conduct a prison visit, as well as on how to manage and report on cases that involve allegations of torture or mistreatment.

7.50 We reviewed the content of all consular training courses offered during our audit period. We found that Global Affairs Canada provided consular officers with general awareness training (through case studies) on the requirements of prison visits. These courses highlighted best practices, such as the importance of clearly explaining the services available (or not) to detained persons, as well as documentation requirements. However,

they did not provide tools or sufficient guidance on how to detect incidents of torture, abuse, or mistreatment. Global Affairs Canada has identified gaps in how it prepares consular officials for conducting prison visits. In particular, it has identified the need for better guidance to consular officers on how to manage their personal security and safety risks.

7.51 In our review of case files for Canadians arrested or detained abroad (and of alleged mistreatment or torture), we found that most consular officers (96%) received general training on arrest and detention and/or torture and mistreatment. However, almost half (44%) of consular staff had taken the training more than five years ago. Global Affairs Canada did not provide cyclical or refresher training on arrest and detention for consular staff, but this training is important to reinforce knowledge and skills.

7.52 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should strengthen its quality control process to ensure its consular officers contact and offer to help Canadians who have been arrested or detained, with a focus on those who may be at greater risk because of who or where they are. As well, consular officers should receive dedicated, cyclical training on arrest and detention cases throughout their careers. Such training should include how to conduct prison visits and provide tools for detecting incidents of torture, abuse, or mistreatment.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of enhancing its quality control mechanisms in regard to maintaining contact with Canadians who are arrested or detained abroad. Global Affairs Canada will review its service standards and reinforce its monitoring activities. Global Affairs Canada is already in the process of modernizing its case management information systems, which will further enhance the quality control and monitoring capabilities of the program.*

The Department has already piloted enhanced training in regard to the safe conduct of prison visits and will extend this to all consular officers. A process will also be put in place to ensure that officers are fully trained, including in arrest and detention cases. The initial actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by December 2018, with final systems updates to be completed by September 2020.

Providing passports and other travel documents to Canadians abroad

Overall message ➔

7.53 Overall, we found that Global Affairs Canada did not process regular passports for Canadians abroad in a timely way across all of its missions. As a result, passports were not delivered on time at several high-volume missions. However, we found that the Department provided other travel documents—such as temporary passports and emergency travel documents—quickly, usually by the expected date of travel.

7.54 We also found that the timeliness of passport delivery was likely overstated in at least one quarter of the missions abroad. Global Affairs Canada did not track how well it delivered most of its other consular services, and as a result, it did not have the information it needed to ensure its missions were appropriately staffed to provide effective and timely services across the globe. We also found that the Department did not have sufficient quality information about its own workload to set an appropriate fee.

7.55 These findings matter because more Canadians are travelling and living abroad than ever before. When services are not delivered within established time frames, Canadians' travel plans, jobs, and lives can be affected.

Context

7.56 Global Affairs Canada provides passport and citizenship services in just about every office or point of service around the world every day. Examples include

- receiving applications for passports at missions abroad,
- reviewing proof of citizenship applications, and
- issuing replacement travel documents.

7.57 One hundred and twenty-five missions abroad issue passports, temporary passports, and emergency travel documents. Between 1 January 2016 and 30 June 2017, Global Affairs Canada received 305,461 applications for these types of travel documents, of which 286,165 were regular passports (Exhibit 7.2).

7.58 Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada share the responsibility for delivering passports to Canadians abroad. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is ultimately responsible for the entire passport program. Its performance target is to deliver 90% of regular passports within 20 business days of receiving a complete application. Global Affairs Canada is responsible for administering passport services at missions abroad. This includes reviewing applications for completeness and accuracy, entering data, and approving applications for processing by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Global Affairs Canada has committed to processing applications within 7 days of receiving a complete application.

7.59 Since 1995, Global Affairs Canada has charged a consular services fee for adult travel documents, including passports, to recover the costs of the consular program. This revenue is meant to cover the costs of providing consular services, such as assistance in cases of arrest and detention, death, or child abduction.

Exhibit 7.2 **One third of regular passports were issued by seven missions**

Mission type	Number of missions	Average number of regular passport applications processed each year
High-volume (Each processed more than 5,000 applications during the audit period*)	7	110,100
Medium-volume (Each processed from 2,000 to 5,000 applications during the audit period*)	20	94,000
Low-volume (Each processed from 1,000 to 1,999 applications during the audit period*)	15	33,500
Very low-volume (Each processed fewer than 1,000 applications during the audit period*)	83	49,000

* 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2017

Source: Data provided by Global Affairs Canada

7.60 At that time, the total cost of offering consular services was about $37 million a year. Dividing that amount by the roughly 1.5 million adult passports issued yearly at that time, the total cost was $25 per passport (included in the passport fee).

7.61 In addition, the consular services fee was approved on the condition that the Department would provide full disclosure of the revenues and costs in its performance reports, and adjust the fee if necessary to ensure revenues did not exceed costs.

Several high-volume missions abroad issued passports late

What we found

7.62 We found that Global Affairs Canada did not process regular passports on time at several of its high-volume missions. Several lower-volume missions also delivered passports late. We also found that, due to data errors, performance results for passports issued abroad were likely overstated.

7.63 We also found that the Department did not track its performance for most of its consular services. As a result, it did not have the information it needed to properly allocate its staff and resources across missions to ensure timely and effective services.

7.64 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topic:

- Timely issue of passports

Why this finding matters

7.65 This finding matters because when Canadians do not receive their passports when they expect them, it can affect their travel schedules, resulting in higher travel costs and unexpected impacts to their jobs and families.

Recommendation

7.66 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.73.

Analysis to support this finding

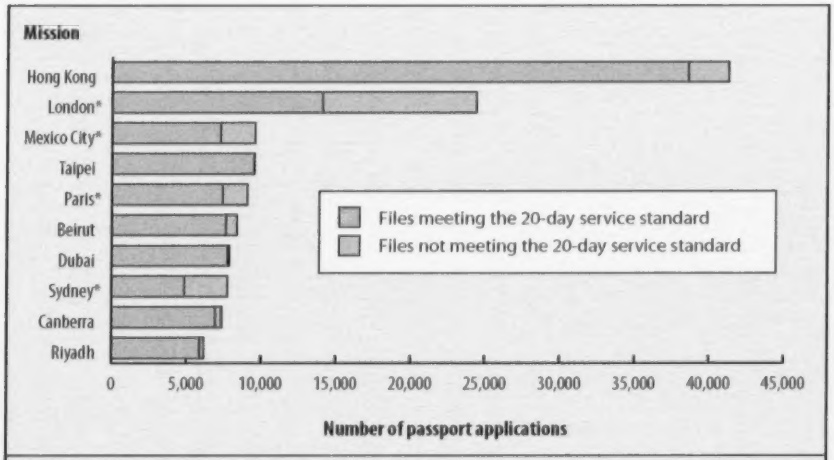
7.67 **What we examined.** We looked at case management data for all regular passports processed between 1 January 2016 and 30 June 2017 at 125 missions around the world. These missions delivered 286,165 passports during that time. We compared processing times with Global Affairs Canada's internal and published service standards.

7.68 **Timely issue of passports.** During our audit, Global Affairs Canada was close to meeting the performance target across 125 missions abroad of delivering 90% of passports within 20 days of receiving a complete application. However, we found that 17 missions issued most of the late passports, meeting the performance target for only 68% of passports. Many of these 17 missions issued thousands of passports each year. New requirements in November 2016 for electronic travel authorizations increased the volume of passport applications, which may have created delays at some missions. However, 10 of 17 missions also had not met service standards in previous years.

7.69 We looked at the missions that processed the highest volumes of passports and found that 4 of the top 10 (Sydney, Paris, London, and Mexico City) did not meet the 20-day performance target during our audit period (Exhibit 7.3). While Global Affairs Canada had identified why some missions were unable to meet passport processing timelines, it did not have a plan to resolve this over the long term.

7.70 As well, we identified instances where consular staff used an incorrect date for passport processing that likely caused performance results to be overstated, including at several high-volume missions. We examined performance at 33 missions that generally met the service standard for passport delivery times yet showed processing anomalies. We found about 13% of the 94,200 passport applications processed at these missions had processing time errors. In these cases, instead of using the date when a complete application was received as the starting point for calculating delivery times, consular staff used the date when they processed the application, which was later.

Exhibit 7.3 **Four of the 10 highest-volume missions did not meet the performance target of delivering at least 90% of passports within 20 business days**



* Mission did not meet the performance target.

Source: Data provided by Global Affairs Canada, 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2017

7.71 Slow processing at missions was part of the problem in meeting the service standard. For passports to be issued within 20 days, missions must process a completed application within 7 business days of receipt. We found that Global Affairs Canada failed to process one quarter of applications within 7 days of receipt. In fact, in all cases where passports were issued late, Global Affairs Canada had taken longer than 7 days to process the applications.

7.72 Global Affairs Canada receives $4.4 million per year to deliver passports from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada under a funding agreement. However, under this agreement, the level of funding was not adjusted by volume of passports processed. At the end of the 2016–17 fiscal year, Global Affairs Canada received an additional $2.6 million to cover estimated expenses it incurred to process increased passport volumes. However, we found that Global Affairs Canada had not significantly improved passport processing times at missions with increased volumes and had started to provide missions with additional resources only in the 2017–18 fiscal year. At the time of our audit, the agreement through which Global Affairs Canada delivered the passport program for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada was under review, including the need to provide sustainable funding and to better track performance results.

7.73 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should examine the reasons for performance variations in passport delivery at its missions abroad in order to improve performance. It should also address weaknesses in its data quality for monitoring performance.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of having reliable data in order to appropriately monitor and manage workforce performance. Global Affairs Canada will analyze performance and data quality variations and, in cooperation with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, put in place a program to address them. Additionally, Global Affairs Canada will review and define reporting standards and ensure that these processes are reflected in the business requirements of new information technology (IT) systems, already in development, to ensure better oversight of passport delivery service. Actions associated with this recommendation will be completed in two broad phases: interim measures are to be completed by the fall of 2018, with the final IT systems to be fully functional no later than May 2021.*

Timely delivery of urgent travel documents was not tracked

What we found

7.74 We found that Global Affairs Canada delivered temporary passports and emergency travel documents to Canadians abroad within about 72 hours of receiving requests, but did not track whether this timing met applicants' travel needs.

7.75 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topics:

- Temporary passports
- Emergency travel documents

Why this finding matters

7.76 This finding matters because Canadians abroad who have an urgent need to travel must obtain travel documents quickly. For example, those whose passports are lost or stolen consider themselves to be in a personal emergency. Often, they need to be able to obtain replacements quickly to avoid expensive delays. Not being able to obtain travel documents quickly in these situations can force Canadians to reschedule flights and pay extra travel expenses, and can have an impact on their families and jobs.

Recommendation

7.77 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.82.

Analysis to support this finding

7.78 **What we examined.** We examined the timeliness of **urgent travel documents** issued to Canadians abroad between 1 January 2016 and 30 June 2017. Where available, we compared the date on which they were printed with the expected dates of travel.

7.79 **Temporary passports.** Global Affairs Canada may issue temporary passports to Canadians to meet urgent travel needs. These are valid for at least six months. Applicants must appear in person, provide proof of travel or residency, and submit an application for a regular passport. During our audit period, Global Affairs Canada issued 14,190 temporary passports. The Department did not track its performance in issuing temporary passports, but we found that on average, across all missions, it took 3.5 days. However, we could not assess whether this timing met travellers' needs because, while consular staff collected information on the expected date of travel, it did not record the date.

7.80 **Emergency travel documents.** From 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2017, Global Affairs Canada prepared 4,301 emergency travel documents for urgent travel to be used by travellers in place of regular or temporary passports. We found that the Department prepared 3,398 of them (79%) within 3 days of receiving a request, issuing most within 2 days. In the remaining cases, missions took anywhere from 4 to 96 days to issue the documents. We found that about 88% of emergency travel documents were ready before the expected date of travel and met travellers' requirements.

7.81 Global Affairs Canada recorded the Canadian traveller's expected date of travel when issuing an emergency travel document, but did not use it to assess whether its service met the traveller's requirements.

7.82 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should monitor its delivery of temporary passports and emergency travel documents to assess performance in meeting travellers' requirements.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the need to monitor the delivery of urgent travel documents in order to ensure that Canadians continue to receive them in a timely manner, while maintaining the security and integrity of the passport program. As such, Global Affairs Canada will, in conjunction with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, further develop its monitoring system for the delivery of emergency travel documents and temporary passports. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by October 2018.*

Urgent travel document—A temporary passport or emergency travel document certifying a person for travel that may be used in place of a regular passport. Consular staff may issue these documents to travellers who need to travel in less than 20 working days, or in extreme circumstances, such as emergency evacuation or the theft or loss of all identity documents.

Mission resources were not aligned with workloads

What we found

7.83 We found that Global Affairs Canada did not track performance for most of its consular services and did not have information available to ensure consistent service across its missions. As a result, the Department could not ensure that its staff were properly allocated to provide timely and effective services.

7.84 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topic:

- Service standards

Why this finding matters

7.85 This finding matters because to ensure adequate staffing (and in turn, the quality and effectiveness of its services), Global Affairs Canada needs accurate information about its missions' workloads.

Recommendation

7.86 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.91.

Analysis to support this finding

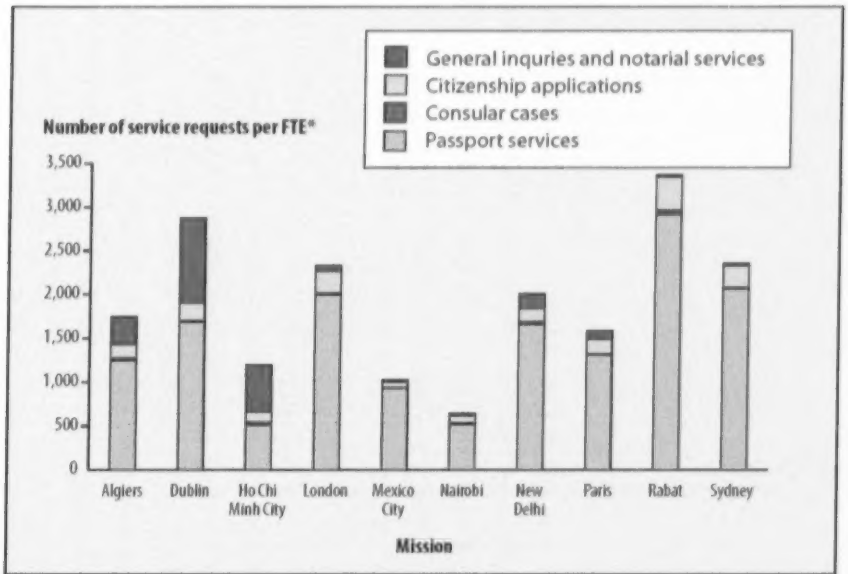
7.87 **What we examined.** We examined Global Affairs Canada's service and performance standards for delivering consular services.

7.88 **Service standards.** We found that Global Affairs Canada did not track its performance for most of its service standards. It also did not have a quality assurance process in place for most of its services.

7.89 We found that Global Affairs Canada monitored its performance for only 3 of the 52 service standards posted on its website. These standards cover a broad range of activities, such as assisting travellers with emergencies, monitoring prisoners, issuing passports, and providing information about Canada. Department officials confirmed that they have not reviewed service standards in more than two decades and that performance against the standards has not been monitored due to poor data quality.

7.90 Staffing at each mission has changed very little over the past decade, yet the number of Canadians travelling abroad has gone up substantially, resulting in varying requests for assistance across most missions (Exhibit 7.4). New requirements—such as electronic travel authorizations, introduced in 2016—have also increased workloads at several missions, yet missions have little scope to adjust their staffing levels in response. Without performance information on the delivery of most of its consular services, Global Affairs Canada did not have the information it needed to staff its missions to provide consistent and effective services.

Exhibit 7.4 **Consular officers in missions around the world were expected to handle very different workloads**



* FTE = full-time-equivalent staff member

Source: Data provided by Global Affairs Canada for the 2016 calendar year

7.91 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should update its performance standards for the delivery of key consular services across its missions and review the level of consular resources allocated across its missions to ensure an effective, consistent level of service to Canadians abroad.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of establishing and maintaining service delivery standards for key consular services provided to Canadians at missions abroad. As such, Global Affairs Canada has begun a review of the consular services provided with a view to updating and modernizing existing service delivery standards. Additionally, Global Affairs Canada will review its resource allocation methodology to ensure that the distribution of resources is optimized across the mission network. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by March 2019.*

The consular services fee was not set to cover costs

What we found

7.92 We found that Global Affairs Canada did not have reliable information to calculate the cost of consular services, which is necessary to set its fee for these services. It also did not track the performance of many of its consular services; tracking is required under the new *Service Fees Act*, which came into effect in June 2017.

7.93 Our analysis supporting this finding presents what we examined and discusses the following topic:

- Reliability of cost information

Why this finding matters

7.94 This finding matters because a consular service fee is included in the total cost of adult travel documents, including passports. The Department is required to set this fee at an amount that will recover the cost of the consular services it provides. It is also required to track and report on its performance in providing these services.

Recommendation

7.95 Our recommendation in this area of examination appears at paragraph 7.101.

Analysis to support this finding

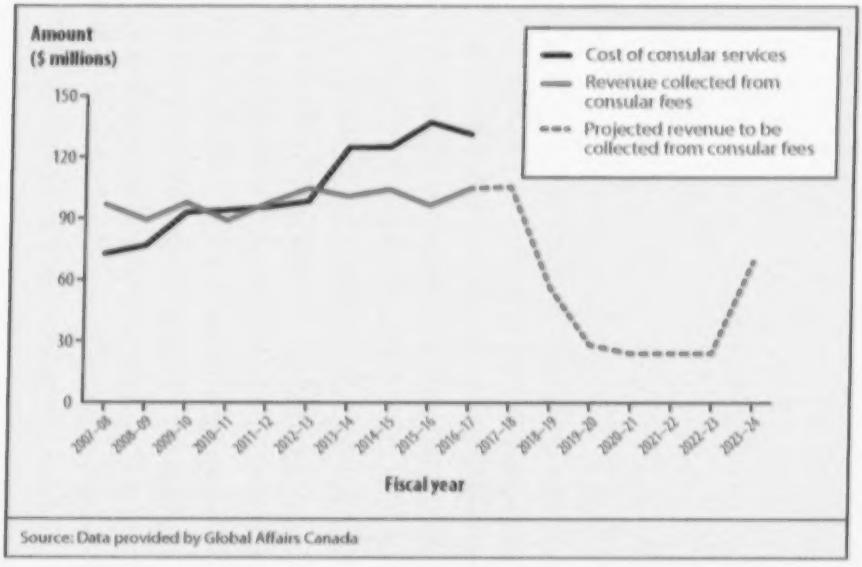
7.96 **What we examined.** We examined the methods used to determine the cost of providing consular services over the past 10 years and compared that cost with the service fee charged.

7.97 **Reliability of cost information.** Global Affairs Canada first began charging a fee for consular services in 1995 by including it in the cost of every adult travel document, including passports. It set the fee at $25, which was based on the estimated cost of providing consular services at the time. As noted in the 2008 May Report of the Auditor General of Canada, Chapter 1—Management of Fees in Selected Departments and Agencies, we examined the Department's method for determining the fee it charged for consular services. We found insufficient support for the cost estimates used to set the fee and recommended that the Department review its estimates to set an appropriate fee. However, it has not changed the fee since then. As well, a 10-year passport is now available, but Global Affairs Canada charges the same $25 fee for both 5- and 10-year passports.

7.98 In the 2016–17 fiscal year, Global Affairs Canada collected $105 million in consular services fees, an amount that did not cover the estimated cost of providing consular services in the same year. The Department's calculation of the cost of providing consular services shows an almost fourfold increase since 1995: from $37 million then to $131 million in the 2016–17 fiscal year. Revenues are expected to decline further as more people purchase the 10-year passport, leading to future funding shortfalls (Exhibit 7.5). We found that the Department had not developed a plan to resolve these shortfalls.

7.99 We found that Global Affairs Canada did not have a reliable method to calculate the cost of providing consular services (the amount used to set its fee and funding arrangements). For example, the main cost of providing consular services is the consular officers' time. But we found that Global Affairs Canada did not have a reliable system in place to capture this information.

Exhibit 7.5 **Revenues from the consular services fees are projected to fall, but the Department had no plan to resolve these shortfalls**



Source: Data provided by Global Affairs Canada

7.100 Global Affairs Canada did not track the extent to which many of its consular services met service standards relevant to the consular service fee. The new *Service Fees Act* came into effect in June 2017 and requires departments to report detailed performance information about the services for which they charge a fee. Guidance outlining the expected performance tracking and reporting was under development at the time of our audit.

7.101 **Recommendation.** Global Affairs Canada should update the cost method it uses to support the consular service fee and its funding arrangements. It should also update its performance information for the consular service fee.

The Department's response. *Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes that the fees collected from Canadians for consular services have fallen short of the cost of delivering these services and that it is important to ensure that consular services fees are underpinned by a robust costing methodology. As such, the Department will review and update the current methodology and costing elements.*

The Department will further develop its mechanisms for measuring performance against service standards, including through the implementation of a new case management system.

The actions associated with the first part of the recommendation will be completed by September 2018, and those related to the second part will be completed by October 2021.

Conclusion

7.102 We concluded that Global Affairs Canada did not have the performance information necessary to ensure it adequately responded to requests for consular assistance from Canadians travelling or living abroad. The ability to provide consular services varied significantly across missions. Because it did not track performance results for most of its consular services, Global Affairs Canada could not ensure that services were effective or appropriate.

About the Audit

This independent assurance report was prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada on Global Affairs Canada's consular services for Canadians abroad. Our responsibility was to provide objective information, advice, and assurance to assist Parliament in its scrutiny of the government's management of resources and programs, and to conclude on whether the consular services offered at Global Affairs Canada's missions abroad complied in all significant respects with the applicable criteria.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard for Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

The Office applies Canadian Standard on Quality Control 1 and, accordingly, maintains a comprehensive system of quality control, including documented policies and procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards, and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

In conducting the audit work, we have complied with the independence and other ethical requirements of the relevant rules of professional conduct applicable to the practice of public accounting in Canada, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour.

In accordance with our regular audit process, we obtained the following from entity management:

- confirmation of management's responsibility for the subject under audit;
- acknowledgement of the suitability of the criteria used in the audit;
- confirmation that all known information that has been requested, or that could affect the findings or audit conclusion, has been provided; and
- confirmation that the audit report is factually accurate.

Audit objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Global Affairs Canada adequately responded to requests for consular assistance for Canadians travelling or living abroad.

Scope and approach

The audit examined Global Affairs Canada's delivery of consular services to Canadians abroad. This included reviewing performance information by mission and a representative selection of case files to examine the Department's documentation of consular services provided. We reviewed the consular services provided in five crisis events during our audit period as well as lessons learned after emergency responses. We also examined the cost methodology for consular services.

Criteria

Criteria	Sources
To determine whether Global Affairs Canada adequately responded to requests for consular assistance for Canadians travelling or living abroad, we used the following criteria:	
Global Affairs Canada establishes priorities and standards for providing consular services to Canadians abroad.	• 21st Century Consular Plan; Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada; 2014 • Departmental Plan 2017–18, Global Affairs Canada • Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada • Consular Services: Service Standards, Global Affairs Canada
Global Affairs Canada's consular resources are aligned with consular program management priorities and requests for consular assistance from Canadians abroad.	• 21st Century Consular Plan; Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada; 2014 • *Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act* • Ultimate HR Manual, Human Resource Professionals Association and CCH
Global Affairs Canada provides up-to-date travel information based on the consular assistance needs of Canadians travelling and living abroad.	• Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada • 21st Century Consular Plan; Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada; 2014 • Canadian Consular Services Charter, Global Affairs Canada
Global Affairs Canada delivers passports and travel documents to Canadians abroad in accordance with established service standards.	• Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada
Global Affairs Canada ensures that Canadians arrested and detained abroad receive timely and appropriate assistance from consular officers.	• Consular Services: Service Standards, Global Affairs Canada • Performance Measurement Framework 2016–18, Global Affairs Canada • Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada
Global Affairs Canada provides guidance and training to consular staff to ensure quality of assistance to Canadians arrested and detained abroad.	• Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada • Ultimate HR Manual, Human Resource Professionals Association and CCH • Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar: Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar, 2006
Global Affairs Canada provides timely consular services to Canadians abroad in response to crises.	• Consular Manual, Global Affairs Canada • Emergency Response Manual, Global Affairs Canada, October 2014
Global Affairs Canada appropriately identifies the cost of consular services subject to recovery and sets an appropriate fee.	• *Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act* • *Consular Services Fees Regulations* • *Service Fees Act*

Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period between 1 January 2016 and 31 October 2017. This is the period to which the audit conclusion applies. However, to gain a more complete understanding of the subject matter of the audit, we also examined certain matters that preceded the starting date of this period.

Date of the report

We obtained sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which to base our conclusion on 4 April 2018, in Ottawa, Canada.

Audit team

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Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Nancy Cheng, Assistant Auditor General, to the production of this report.

List of Recommendations

The following table lists the recommendations and responses found in this report. The paragraph number preceding the recommendation indicates the location of the recommendation in the report, and the numbers in parentheses indicate the location of the related discussion.

Recommendation	Response
Providing emergency services to Canadians abroad	
7.23 To improve its ability to respond to future crises abroad, Global Affairs Canada should complete lessons-learned reports and action plans after each crisis and track the implementation of the resulting recommendations. As well, it should further develop a communications and outreach strategy, including an analysis of specific types of travellers, to inform Canadians about international travel risks and what consular services are available in times of crisis. **(7.13–7.22)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the important role of lessons-learned reports in continually improving emergency response for Canadians and will further standardize the elements of lessons-learned reports across all types of emergencies. Global Affairs Canada will continue to track the implementation of the resulting recommendations. Global Affairs Canada will also further develop its communications and outreach strategy in order to better inform Canadians about travel risks, the importance of preparedness, and the types of consular services that are available in times of crisis. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by October 2018.
7.32 Global Affairs Canada should review and update its travel advisories in accordance with its 18-month mandatory cyclical review policy. It should improve its communications and outreach strategy to best target at-risk travellers with information based on an analysis of their needs. **(7.24–7.31)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of providing up-to-date information to Canadians about safe travel abroad and will continue to enhance efforts to ensure travel information is current. Further steps will be taken to ensure that Travel Advice and Advisories pages are subject to overall cyclical reviews on schedule. Global Affairs Canada will continue to provide targeted advice to Canadians and will also enhance its external communications plan in order to extend its reach through additional targeted briefings and outreach. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by September 2018.

Recommendation	Response
Contacting Canadians arrested or detained abroad	
7.52 Global Affairs Canada should strengthen its quality control process to ensure its consular officers contact and offer to help Canadians who have been arrested or detained, with a focus on those who may be at greater risk because of who or where they are. As well, consular officers should receive dedicated, cyclical training on arrest and detention cases throughout their careers. Such training should include how to conduct prison visits and provide tools for detecting incidents of torture, abuse, or mistreatment. **(7.40–7.51)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of enhancing its quality control mechanisms in regard to maintaining contact with Canadians who are arrested or detained abroad. Global Affairs Canada will review its service standards and reinforce its monitoring activities. Global Affairs Canada is already in the process of modernizing its case management information systems, which will further enhance the quality control and monitoring capabilities of the program. The Department has already piloted enhanced training in regard to the safe conduct of prison visits and will extend this to all consular officers. A process will also be put in place to ensure that officers are fully trained, including in arrest and detention cases. The initial actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by December 2018, with final systems updates to be completed by September 2020.
Providing passports and other travel documents to Canadians abroad	
7.73 Global Affairs Canada should examine the reasons for performance variations in passport delivery at its missions abroad in order to improve performance. It should also address weaknesses in its data quality for monitoring performance. **(7.62–7.72)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of having reliable data in order to appropriately monitor and manage workforce performance. Global Affairs Canada will analyze performance and data quality variations and, in cooperation with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, put in place a program to address them. Additionally, Global Affairs Canada will review and define reporting standards and ensure that these processes are reflected in the business requirements of new information technology (IT) systems, already in development, to ensure better oversight of passport delivery service. Actions associated with this recommendation will be completed in two broad phases: interim measures are to be completed by the fall of 2018, with the final IT systems to be fully functional no later than May 2021.
7.82 Global Affairs Canada should monitor its delivery of temporary passports and emergency travel documents to assess performance in meeting travellers' requirements. **(7.74–7.81)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the need to monitor the delivery of urgent travel documents in order to ensure that Canadians continue to receive them in a timely manner, while maintaining the security and integrity of the passport program. As such, Global Affairs Canada will, in conjunction with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, further develop its monitoring system for the delivery of emergency travel documents and temporary passports. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by October 2018.

Recommendation	Response
7.91 Global Affairs Canada should update its performance standards for the delivery of key consular services across its missions and review the level of consular resources allocated across its missions to ensure an effective, consistent level of service to Canadians abroad. **(7.83–7.90)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of establishing and maintaining service delivery standards for key consular services provided to Canadians at missions abroad. As such, Global Affairs Canada has begun a review of the consular services provided with a view to updating and modernizing existing service delivery standards. Additionally, Global Affairs Canada will review its resource allocation methodology to ensure that the distribution of resources is optimized across the mission network. The actions associated with this recommendation will be completed by March 2019.
7.101 Global Affairs Canada should update the cost method it uses to support the consular service fee and its funding arrangements. It should also update its performance information for the consular service fee. **(7.92–7.100)**	**The Department's response.** Agreed. Global Affairs Canada recognizes that the fees collected from Canadians for consular services have fallen short of the cost of delivering these services and that it is important to ensure that consular services fees are underpinned by a robust costing methodology. As such, the Department will review and update the current methodology and costing elements. The Department will further develop its mechanisms for measuring performance against service standards, including through the implementation of a new case management system. The actions associated with the first part of the recommendation will be completed by September 2018, and those related to the second part will be completed by October 2021.

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